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KOCHI-MUZIRIS BIENNALE 2025

SCAFFOLDING THE FUTURE

India's biggest contemporary art event has had a bumpy ride recently — from budget issues to last edition's inconvenient delay. Can curator Nikhil Chopra help regain goodwill, and will the sixth outing better the rest?

Nidhi Gupta

For two decades now, artist Nikhil Chopra and his personae have walked the planet, eating, dressing, pondering, undressing, and sleeping like the rest of us. Unlike most of us, their habitats have ranged from basements in Ohio and town squares in Havana, parks in Budapest and the meadows of Kashmir, prestigious museums in New York and Berlin to derelict warehouses in Kochi.

Yog Raj Chitrakar, Michelle, Black Pearl, Sir Raja and about a dozen more: Chopra has slipped in and out of each character that's been drafted as carefully, mindfully and luxuriously (complete with elaborate costumes and make-up) as the paintings (most often landscapes) that he creates over several hours, if not days, as them. Through his personae – as they seek reconciliation, transformation, even transcendence in the elements that they replicate from memory in charcoal, lipstick, crayon, oils, chocolate, slurry – Chopra has negotiated the fault lines of time, space and identity, reckoning frequently with historic flows of power and channels of inequity. All this, while colouring within the question at the core of all human experience: the making and unmaking of the self.

Now though, the only drawing he is working on is the one stretched out on the walls of his home studio in Goa. And the only persona that he has the wherewithal to cultivate is that of the curator – of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale (KMB) 2025. "I am certainly thinking about playing curator as a performance, the rigour and endurance that one has to go through," says Chopra, sitting on the deck of his brand new home in Aldona under a canopy of palm trees glowing a spectral green against a monsoon sky. "I am very much seeing this biennale as a long durational performance piece."

Of rigour and friendship economies

It is a few months since Chopra's last performance, *From Land to Fire*, at the Glynn Vivian art gallery in Swansea – eight hours of dwelling in and on the Copperopolis, the historical nickname for the Welsh city and a powerhouse of the Industrial Age. Weeks after that, he sat on stage at a Mumbai studio as the Asia Society's Trailblazer for 2025, in conversation with contemporary artist Jitish Kallat, discussing his particular approach to artmaking, while feeling acutely a sense of homecoming, and the enormity of this year, which is his 50th.

"I looked around and saw so many familiar faces, and felt this overwhelming sense of gratitude and validation and recognition," he enthuses, remembering his days in Mumbai in the early years of the millennium, a city he left around 2012 due to the rising cost of living and declining space to create, for Goa, where he was drawn to an easy pace and non-competitive nature of life. "This obviously drove the point home, that nothing can or should be done on your own."

That conviction in community has defined more of Chopra's practice than is immediately obvious – especially since his return from a transformational residency at the Freie Universität, Berlin in 2012. Behind the scenes of the performer-painter striking out solo has been a cavalry of lifelong collaborators, including costume designer Louis Braganza, and photographers Madhavi Gore and Shivani Gupta. Gore and Gupta have also been elemental to the creation and continuing operation of HH Art Spaces, the Goa-based artist-run movement that Chopra started in 2014, alongside French artist Romain Loustau – and which is on the banner as curator for this edition of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale.

"At HH Art Spaces, we've been looking at artists that are engaged in process," says Chopra. "We do residencies, we run studio spaces – we are really engaged in their way of manifesting their ideas into not just stuff, but into experiences." It's why, says Chopra, one of the most important aspects of what they're looking at [for the KMB] is the presence of the artist in their own work. "We've really leaned upon this idea of labouring over one's craft, a practitioner's relationship to rigour with material."

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On the sidelines

Every edition of KMB sees several collabs and fringe events. This year, 'The Ishara House' is one such. With Riyas Komu as its artistic director, and designed by the artists and academics of Aazhi Archives, the project (separate from KMB) will encompass a curated exhibition titled *Amphibian Aesthetics*, as well as public programmes and initiatives. The exhibition, with new artistic commissions spanning South Asia, the Gulf, Africa and beyond, will examine how migration has historically facilitated complex confluences, underlining the role of maritime exchange in shaping society, power and resistance.

At Kashi Hallegua House, Jew Town

Story behind the white

Over the years, KMB has had its share of creative collabs. Like 'Kochi Biennale White', a custom gallery white developed by Asian Paints along with artists Riyas Komu, Bose Krishnamachari, and Sudarshan Shetty. The versatile colour had no undertones and was used, and still is, across the Biennale's exhibition spaces to provide a neutral yet deep backdrop for the artworks.

Nikhil's interrogation of colonial and local, public and private, mask and wearer, is what makes him a trailblazer in contemporary South Asian art. His profound belief in communities is embodied in his practice too, and I can't wait to see his curatorial vision come to life at the upcoming Kochi-Muziris Biennale — which is an essential part of not just the global art calendar but public life. It [KMB] is a microcosm of cross-cultural dialogue; it integrates art and public spaces in a way that invites everyone to explore art freely and unselfconsciously. It lives up to it's reputation as the people's biennale.

INAKSHI SOBTI
CEO, Asia Society India Centre

The people's biennale Visitors at an earlier edition of KMB; (bottom) *Improvise* by Asim Waqif (2022). (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

Every biennale has had its own tone, its own context, its own incredible successes and also its failures. But everything in its nascency goes through difficulties. The biennale has done a lot of self-reflection to understand where its shortfalls were. And one of them was management — of not just people, but also of funds — because of wanting to put Kochi and India on the international art map. What Bose and Riyas did back in 2012 was take a giant leap. It was a debate and it was urgent, and it still feels urgent. The success of the biennale is in spite of its failures, and we'll continue to do that.

NIKHIL CHOPRA
Curator, KMB 2025-2026

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GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

MYSTERY AND MAYHEM

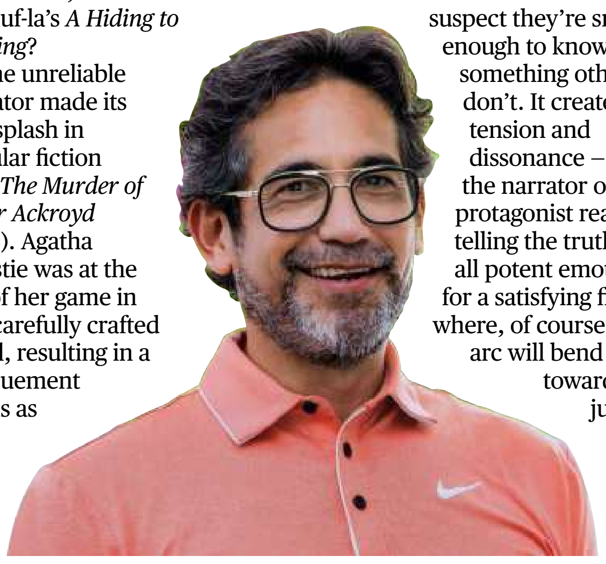
There's potential in the chaos that author Chhimi Tenduf-la brings to his new novel, but a case of too many cooks spoils this thriller

Sumana Mukherjee

A young boy goes missing in the calm, verdant holiday island of Sri Lanka. One minute, he's in the backseat of his mum's car, the next minute, he's gone after the mum falls for one of the oldest distractions in the world on the highway. Where's he gone, who took him? Who's the good Samaritan who comes to help the shocked mother – Neja Pinto, with a very important and abhorred political mother-in-law – and why aren't the police summoned?

All pleasantly cosy questions that set up for a moderately thrilling read on a monsoon evening – but do we believe what we read, told as it is mostly through Neja's perspective, in Chhimi Tenduf-la's *A Hiding to Nothing*?

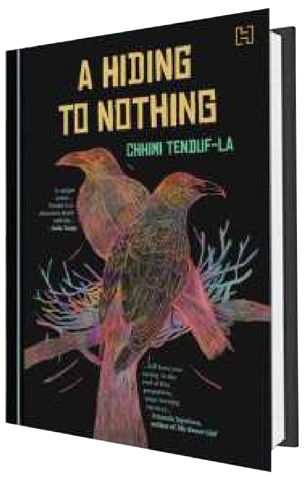
The unreliable narrator made its first splash in popular fiction with *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926). Agatha Christie was at the top of her game in this carefully crafted novel, resulting in a denouement that is as astonishing today as it was a hundred years ago. Since then, the device has been widely adopted across media with varying degrees of success, the most recent headline-grabbing one being, of course, *Gone Girl*.



Unreliable much?

For the gimmick to work, the destabilisation needs to be a slow process for the characters *in* the narrative as much as for the reader or viewer. Imagine an idyllic family scene – parents and children out on a picnic, and a metaphorical mask slipping, maybe, or a meek chemistry teacher finding a new move in the bedroom (*Breaking Bad*, anyone?) – something that evokes a reaction within the story even as we across the fourth wall go, a-ha!

In this scenario, it's critical that the reader or viewer suspect they're smart enough to know something others don't. It creates tension and dissonance – is the narrator or the protagonist really telling the truth? – all potent emotions for a satisfying finale where, of course, the arc will bend towards justice.



A Hiding to Nothing
Chhimi Tenduf-la
Hachette India
₹599

The basic problem with Tenduf-la's protagonist is that *everyone* in the narrative believes Neja is unreliable – and she doesn't help her own case much. Neja doesn't walk, she stumbles. Her vision is perpetually blurred – and lest you think that's metaphorical, her thighs "vibrate against each other". She's forever dehydrated (or drinking wine or tequila on an empty stomach); at one time, she clambers across the façade of a house in nothing but her birthday suit (jeez, girl, did you have to lose the towel?).

Despite the awareness this could be deliberate, it still serves to make her pretty annoying. And she's not the only one: there's also the vastly infuriating Ramesh, the husband, a strongman named Popeye, a mysterious embassy staffer called Mercy, a shady British hotelier, rotund balding Asian men, a randy swimming coach, a lookalike womb-on-hire, her former stalker, aliases, red tuk-tuks... phew. There are so many characters, so many timelines, so many unclear motivations, so many red tuk-tuks, sorry, red herrings, that one can almost empathise with Neja in the head-reeling aspect.

Problematic portrayal

To be fair, Tenduf-la doesn't just depend on chaos to drive his story. Occasionally, the author displays flashes of a wicked sense of humour, which makes you think it is he who is having the last laugh on the reader. But too many times, Neja's desperate question – "Where is my son?" – falls on retreating backs, as people who should have the answer stage unexplained exits. Ekta Kapoor would have been proud of the hook.

Underlying the apparent incoherence, there are themes of love and loss in the novel but the near-fetishisation of motherhood – from the school mums' text group to Ramesh's relationship with his dragon-mother, to Neja's own get-out-of-jail-free card, played with almost no foreshadowing and certainly no warning – is problematic. The Neja part of it is objectively a great twist but, by the time it springs on us, we care so little, it's all we can do to mutter, good for her, turn off the bedside lamp and settle into a peaceful night.

It's all a bit of a pity. The half-British, half-Tibetan Colombo-based Tenduf-la's previous novels were received fairly well and this one, too, had the potential to be a really zany post-truth dark comedy. Instead, this thriller-wannabe feels like a force-fit for a different genre.

The reviewer is a Bengaluru-based writer and editor.

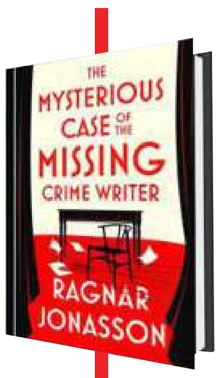
ONE FOR THE ROAD

War, witches and wildlife

A diverse selection of popular fiction, from mysteries to historical fiction

Swati Daftuar

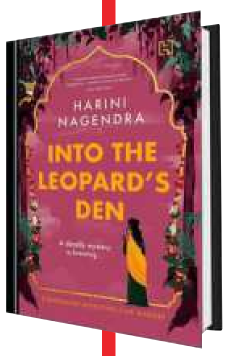
A crime writer gone missing, a cosy sleuthing trip to Bannerghatta, post-war letters of advice, a haunted restaurant in rural Bengal, and academic hauntings at New England colleges – this month's lineup of popular fiction from around the world has a little bit of everything. A mix of pace, wit, heart, and just enough darkness to keep you turning the pages.



The Mysterious Case of the Missing Crime Writer | Ragnar Jónasson

Jónasson began translating Agatha Christie into Icelandic at 17 – he's done 14 of her novels since – and you can feel that affection for the Golden Age here. When a famous crime writer vanishes on the eve of her latest release, a small-town bookseller finds himself in the middle of the search. It's part homage, part puzzle-box, with a few sly winks at the publishing world. Crisp, witty, and full of satisfying twists, it's the sort of book you want to start again the moment you finish.

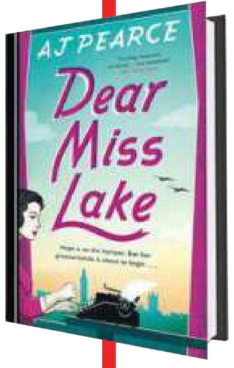
(Penguin; ₹899)



Into the Leopard's Den | Harini Nagendra

Nagendra is an ecologist and professor, and it shows – her fiction is steeped in place and detail. This outing in the Bangalore Detectives Club Mystery series takes Inspector Gowda and amateur detective Kaveri Murthy into the forests of Bannerghatta National Park, investigating the death of a wildlife activist. The backdrop is rich with the realities of human-wildlife conflict, while the mystery itself is warm yet sharply observant. A cosy read, but one with claws.

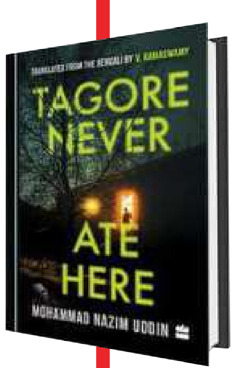
(Hachette India; ₹499)



Dear Miss Lake | A.J. Pearce

Pearce's historical fiction series *The Emmy Lake Chronicles* began with her picking up a 1939 women's magazine at a vintage fair for £1 – and finding an agony aunt page that became the spark for the books. In this post-war chapter (the fourth instalment), the Blitz is over but rationing and grief remain. Emmy, now a magazine columnist, must navigate the everyday uncertainties of a country remaking itself. Pearce's touch is light but sure: the humour lands, the heartache is real, and the optimism feels hard-won.

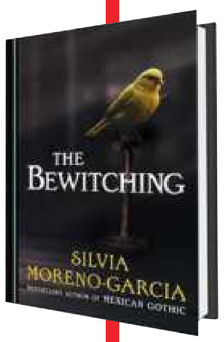
(Picador; ₹699)



Tagore Never Ate Here | Mohammad Nazim Uddin, trs V. Ramaswamy

Uddin plates magical realism like a tasting menu – one course, one clue, one chill. The pull here isn't plot machinations so much as texture: spice, smoke, silence. Mysterious restaurant owner Mushkan Zubeiri is less a character than a gravitational field, while detective Noore Chhafa orbits, singed. A Bengali bestseller (*Rabindranath Ekhane Kokhono Khete Asenni*), it even spun off a Srijit Mukherji web series – fitting for a book that feels staged in shadow and steam.

(HarperCollins India; ₹399)



The Bewitching | Silvia Moreno-Garcia

Think witches as chilling predators, not pop-culture mascots. Between a haunted campus, a 1930s horror author, and a 1908 farmhouse in Mexico, Moreno-Garcia spins a gothic current that never lets you stand still. She studied at Endicott College – fictionalised here as Stoneridge – and the image of a colonial graveyard tucked behind a shopping lot near campus became the seed for this book's eerie core. Reading it can feel like catching movement just at the corner of your vision.

(Hachette; ₹799)

The writer is an independent journalist, editor, and literary curator.

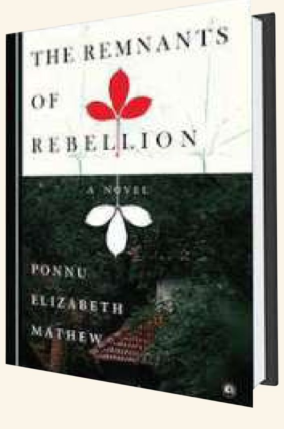
Revolt amid the rubber trees

A debut novel that paints a picture of verdant Kerala while also highlighting its dark chapters of communal and caste violence

Preeti Zachariah
preeti.zachariah@thehindu.co.in

When Aleyamma, the primary protagonist of Ponnu Elizabeth Mathew's debut novel, *The Remnants of Rebellion*, arrives at the house on the hill at Puthuloor, it "feels like home" even though she has never been here before. The house with "fifteen rooms, leaving out the corridors, loggias and curiously shaped spaces" has been left to this tormented artist by her late grandfather.

And it is here in Puthuloor, "fecund with *Hevea brasiliensis*, para rubber trees, a testament to the rule of the British crown and their first attempts at rubber cultivation on a plantation scale", that Aleyamma must make sense of the lingering vestiges of the past. She must also contend with casual sexism, the rise of Hindu nationalism and her failing relationship with her mother, while navigating her feelings for an older married man.



The Remnants of Rebellion
Ponnu Elizabeth Mathew
Aleph
₹899

Atmospheric prose

Like Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Mathew's novel too offers an insider-outsider, often critical, take on Kerala's Syrian Christian community: the mythology surrounding its origins, insights into its cultural practices and history, and how the idea of "chosenness" often perpetuates endogamy, othering and narcissism.

The story, alternating between the past and present, is told in deeply immersive, atmospheric prose that plunges the reader into the heart of the verdant, sodden landscape of southern Kerala – beautiful, but also a hotspot of communal and caste tensions.

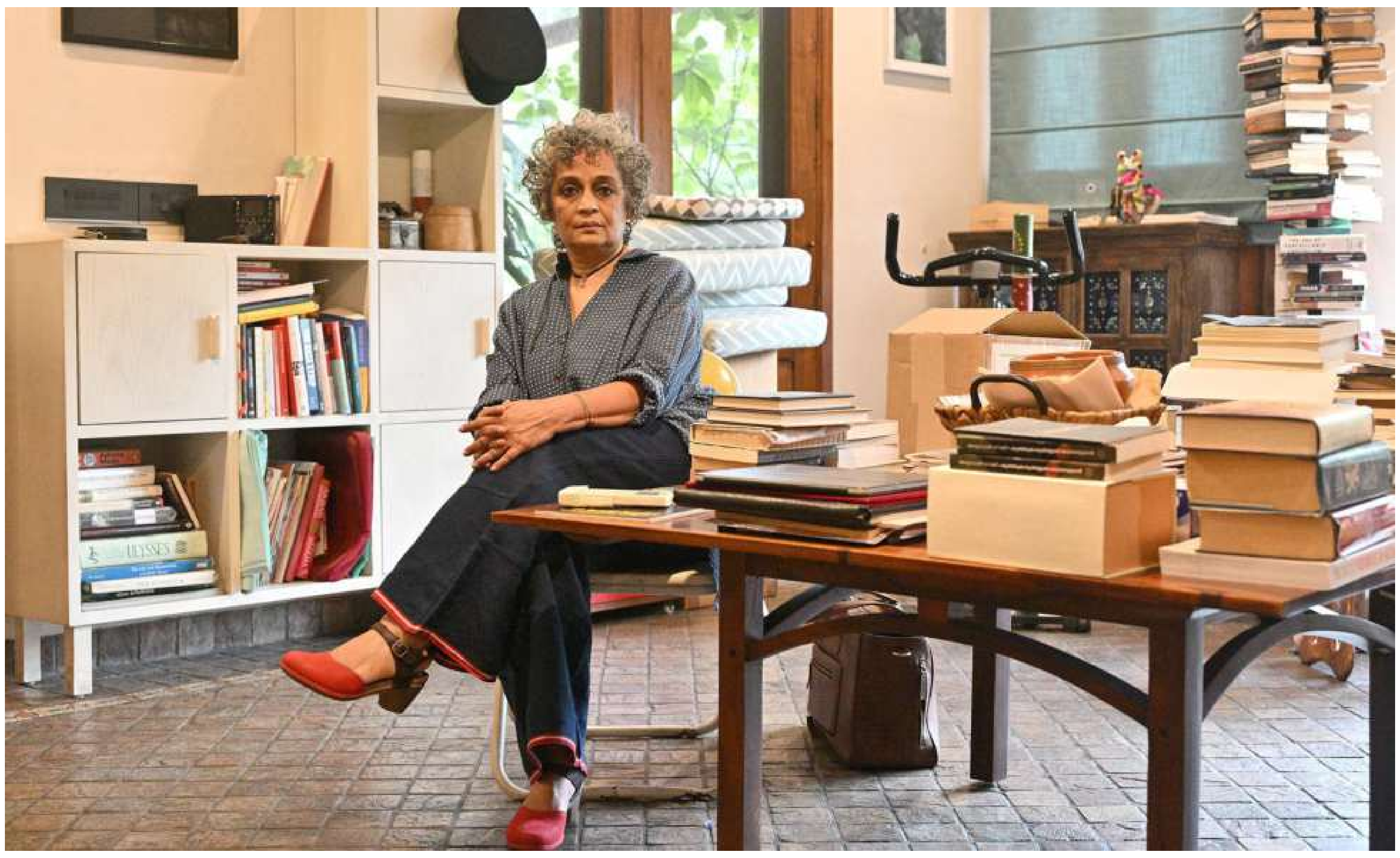
Representational picture. (GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK)

Nuanced storytelling

The novel's finely-etched characters are memorable, and to Mathew's credit, rarely venture in caricatures, whether it be the dreadlocked, confused Aleyamma; her mean-spirited, obese mother; Elsy Chedatty, who cooks like a dream and "drives a Willys Jeep like a veteran"; the enterprising, progressive Eesho, her late grandfather; or the mysterious Krishnan Uncle, "Appacha's best friend, driver and Aleyamma's Maths tutor".

The Remnants of Rebellion is not without its flaws. At times, the pace of the narrative lags and the motivations of some of its characters are not entirely convincing.

Having said that, Mathew's novel is also one of the most engaging and authentic stories to come from a debut Indian novelist in the recent past. Told with nuance that allows for moral greyness, it achieves what good fiction always does: open up new worlds and ways of being.



Arundhati Roy won the Booker Prize in 1997 for her debut novel *The God of Small Things*. (SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP)

INTERVIEW

'I JUST WANT TO BE. LET ME BE'

Arundhati Roy on the legacy of her mother Mary Roy, their complicated relationship, and how leaving home at 18 shaped her life

Neha Dixit

Arundhati Roy had never planned to write a memoir. That changed when she lost her most captivating and complicated subject: her mother, Mary Roy. *Mother Mary Comes to Me* (Hamish Hamilton) is a window into Mary Roy's world: a woman who built a school from scratch, fought for women's equal rights under Christian inheritance laws, and navigated life in Kottayam like a superhero with the edge of a gangster till the age of 89.

Arundhati wanted to write about her mother without any resolution, leaving the loose ends flying. But it is also about what made Arundhati: hunger, cruelty, stigma, and generational violence, her mother's bouts of asthma and violent rage. Arundhati left home at 18 to be on her own; and continue loving her mother. She slogged, worked, understood different loves, won a Booker prize, went to jail, battles legal cases and shares her money to fund other people's works, and yet says, "The more I was hounded as an anti-national, the surer I was that India was the place I loved, the place to which I belonged."

In a world distraught by so much emotional, physical, social violence, this book is a stunning, honest reminder that we are all broken but capable of love, anger, horrible things, and extreme generosity. As Arundhati says: "Because people are not ideologies, they are wild. Some cannot be put under neat divisions, categories, or 'faux-therapy' labels, and yet need to be part of literature and history." Excerpts from an interview:

Question: *What does it take to accept our parents as they are?*

Answer: I told somebody the other day that I think the truth is that I was her mother. I was the one that was indulging this wild, genius, cruel, mean, wonder child. I was the one who had to hold my peace because of my mother's illness all the time. In many ways, our roles were completely reversed. I felt that ultimately, we were just two adults who were sort of dealing with each other in some way. I stopped being a child or having any expectations of her as a mother long ago. I left. Because I would have been crushed if I hadn't… But I never wanted to defeat her. I never wanted to win. I wanted her to go out, like a queen. And she did.

Q: *You do that for your father as well, you let him be when you met him for the first time.*

A: As I write in the book, I did spend a whole night away looking at myself, wondering, God, what am I going to need, and then it was just like beyond everything I could have possibly imagined. I was 25. I was already a pretty political being. It took me three seconds to shift between shock at seeing him in the complete mess that he was – peeing in his clothes, his ear bitten off and all that. And then suddenly being like, 'Oh, God, thank God he's not a CEO!' I would have been more distressed dealing with that.

Q: *To escape her violent father, your mother married the first person who proposed to her. What does it say about generational violence? What kind of individuals and societies does it create?*

A: It's not only that my mother experienced the violence of her father, but she also inherited that violence. It wasn't just a reaction to that violence. She was also like that. I can see how both my brother and I made a very conscious effort not to replicate that. But I think intergenerational violence and trauma are very real things. Not just intra-family, but also caste, ethnicity and religion and all of that.

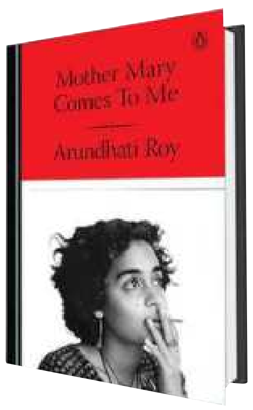
You can feel it trapped in your muscles sometimes. I feel that if there has been violence, and you have been the victim of it, emotional or physical or sexual or social, you have to find the strength to not think of yourself as a victim. The minute you do that, you circumscribe yourself. That's not easy to do in our social systems. That's not easy to do in today's India, [if you are] a Muslim, woman, whatever, but even if it's not easy to do, it is the task that you have. No one else can sort you out.

Q: *You have a towering personality. Who would have thought that you also had your struggles of coming from a small town and being in this big city?*

A: For me, the guiding principle has been the search for real liberty, real freedom. Obviously, freedom from whatever was going on at home. People say, "You were so brave." I say, "No, I wasn't brave. I did not have a choice. My choice was to be crushed and killed." So it's not bravery, it's desperation. But once you make that choice then the point is why? Because I want to be happy, not because I want to suffer. It's been a constant search for some sort of ideal freedom. I'm following some sort of chemical trail in my head, which is the trail of freedom. That means freedom from being trapped by your attachment, from having a lot of money or wanting to be famous forever, or indeed wanting to look young forever or wanting to botox my way into youth. I don't want to. I just want to be, just let me be.

Q: *Why do you feel, as you have mentioned a number of times, that you 'make your safest place the most dangerous, when it is not, I make it so.'*

A: Once childhood has been totally unsafe… I mean, it can be that you live in Kashmir or you live on the streets, and you have external dangers. But it's a different matter if your own mother is the danger. Then you don't trust anything. I'm always drawn towards the unsafe. It's easy for me to understand that. It's harder for me to understand this happy family s**t. So sometimes, even when there is a relationship which seems very secure, it makes me almost feel like I can't breathe. Like, "Where's the danger? Let me go!"



Q: *In the 2000s, you were accused of 'celebrityhood' while talking about people's movements. Now you live in a world dominated by social media influencers, where everyone wants to be a celebrity. How do you assess this world?*

A: When I wrote *The God of Small Things*, I suddenly became this celebrity on the cover of every magazine. Then there was this rage when I wrote *The End of Imagination*, and then I started writing on Narmada.

You do have to go through a period where people misunderstand you, call you names, attribute motives to you and all of that. I think my Mary Roy training of not responding helped. I was like, I'll just keep doing what I'm doing until they get bored, or tired, or realise that at least they aren't true.

What's very interesting is that while writing those essays, I knew that I was going to get a hate attack. I wasn't necessarily writing to be liked. The like button didn't exist. I wonder where that is any more, because now, even if you're in the alternate media, you have to be liked. You have to belong somewhere. Whereas at that time, I belonged nowhere. I was just saying what I thought.

Now, it is very temporary, but there's a level of democratisation because of online. But it's still a corporate space, still controlled. You move everybody online and then you shut off the internet; for months, like they did in Kashmir. It's like you're forcing everyone economically in terms of media, everything online, and then you control it. So the minute things are not to your liking, you switch it off, and here we are, all of us thinking they're free and so on.

Q: *You write about this alloy created by blending Hindu nationalism and corporate interests. In the last 11-12 years, how has it shaped not just India but the world around us?*

A: In *The Doctor and the Saint*, I wrote, if you just look at who these corporations and what castes these families belong to… what does it show?

It's not just Hindu nationalism. It's like modernising and corporatising caste in that way. It's absolutely shocking. Then you look at the judges, you look at the media, the ownership, it's like you're running an apartheid society, but it's not colour-coded, it's got some other kind of code. What is the aim of this? The aim of this is that those particular castes continue to rule disguised as nationalists. And that wealth continues to be concentrated in fewer and fewer hands.

The Delhi-based independent journalist is the author of the book The Many Lives of Syeda X.

Scan the QR code to listen to Arundhati in conversation on **magazine.thehindu.co.in**

A view of old heritage Chettiar homes near Tirumayam in Pudukkottai district. (M. MOORTHY)

The golden age of Chettiars

Raman Mahadevan provides an invaluable dossier of a South Indian community that still remains uniquely different

Geeta Doctor

Reading Raman Mahadevan's deft and definitive profile of Tamil Nadu's business community, the Nattukottai Chettiars of Chettinad, led to what can only be termed a past life regression moment in my mind. I hope I will be forgiven for describing it.

In the glory days of Khushwant Singh's determination to highlight various different Indian communities in the *Illustrated Weekly* of the mid-1970s in Bombay as it was known then, I was asked to seek out and explore the Nattukottai Chettiars of Tamil Nadu. I had as a companion a Gujarati husband who would accompany me to what seemed then a very distant place in South India. This was a sensible ploy for when I reached there as the honoured guest of the Raja of Chettinad – whom I had met earlier in what was then Madras – none of the persons I encountered were willing to talk to me directly. I would ask my questions. They would answer them looking at my husband. In the process, I met many of the leading persons who are named in the book.

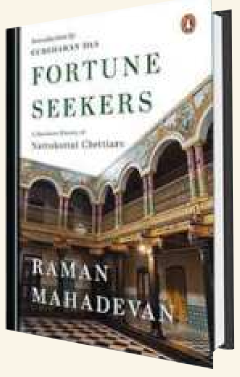
Mahadevan's great achievement is in retracing the trajectory of the Nattukottai Chettiar presence in what could be described as an empire within an empire of Greater India as it existed under colonial rule. It's come at an opportune moment. There's been an extraordinary renaissance in the corridors and interior courtyards of the grand old Chettiar mansions that have given the community its moniker – people who live in country forts as a tourist destination of multiple interests. The golden age of the Chettiars in the late 19th century often meant the menfolk returning with amazing amounts of western artefacts, clocks, mirrors, bentwood furniture, hanging glass lamps, floor tiles and suchlike. These have now become a veritable museum of their travels into time.

Empire within an empire

Recreating the ambience of their glory days are the small coterie of Chettiar women who have led the revival. They have simultaneously created a boost for the local crafts of basketry, textiles and dry legumes and fruits traditionally garnered from their regions. Oddly enough, Mahadevan barely mentions the role played by the Chettiar women, the *achis*, as the older ladies are called, who stayed back and maintained their individual strongholds during the long absences of the men.

Monopolies in trade

As Gurcharan Das, the pundit on matters pertaining to corporate India in our times, tells us in the preface, the study is part of an on-going Penguin series 'The Story of Indian Business'. Or as he puts it: "Each slender volume offers an enduring perspective on enterprise, meant to promote a longer-term sensibility regarding *artha*, the material base of our civilization."



Fortune Seekers: A Business History of the Nattukottai Chettiars
Raman Mahadevan
Penguin Business
₹599

To that extent Mahadevan sticks to the formula: "Follow the money" as indeed the tagline tells us. What makes the Chettiars different is not just their forays into Southeast Asia where they made their fortunes both as traders and merchant bankers, but their very resilient intra-caste module. The clans grouped around the nine temple towns of the Ramnad district over 78 villages. One of the earliest donors was a salt merchant who had made a promise to donate a tithe to a famous temple in the salt-starved Palani region of the Madurai district. Interestingly, a monopoly in salt became a feature of the Chettiar trade in basic domestic consumption needs.

We hear, for instance, that they traded paddy and rice from Bengal to Burma and Ceylon. Other items, such as cotton, were from closer home in Tinnevelly. Their willingness to cross the seas brings to mind the Parsi community, who were also shipbuilders in their time. Like the Parsis, some of the Chettiar trade to Southeast Asia consisted of opium and raw spirits, such as arrack. Unlike the Parsis, who went on to create an industrial base for textiles early in the mid-19th century, the Chettiars preferred to concentrate on their banking skills in Burma and Malaya. The Burma teak was valuable for the use of railway sleepers. The rubber from Malaya was needed for the newly evolving automobile sector, as also tin, though these were primarily in the hands of the local Chinese.

Mahadevan tracks the heyday with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 all the way up to the Great Depression of the 1920s. The Second World War brought in its wake the Japanese occupation of the happy hunting grounds of the Chettiars. By that time, the Chettiars owned large tracts of Burma. The retreat of colonial powers brought an end to the Nattukottai hegemony. This is where Mahadevan poses the most crucial questions about whether the failure was also due to the intra-caste bonds of the community.

By his meticulous tracking of the legendary figures that made up the Nattukottai Chettiars, Mahadevan has provided an invaluable dossier of a South Indian community that still remains uniquely different.

The reviewer is a Chennai-based critic and commentator

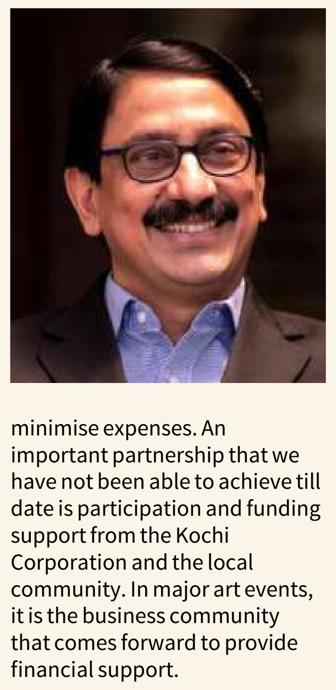
‘The challenge is to build durable partnerships’

V. Venu, chairperson of the Kochi Biennale Foundation’s Board of Trustees, on guardrails and lessons learnt

Key lessons from the first edition to now.
The major learnings over the last five editions is that we have to create a robust framework that will support the Biennale. This would mean creating a small professional team that works on the event full time; enlist art lovers, philanthropists and organisations that provide regular funding support; and persuade the community and city institutions to ‘own’ the event.

Guardrails for a premier art event such as the Kochi-Muziris Biennale.
The biennale is a publicly funded event; the Board of Trustees are custodians of this public trust. It is important to be transparent. As a significant part of the funding of the Biennale comes from the government, it is incumbent on us to maintain meticulous accounts and be subject to audits. The second: to speak to the art community and become its voice. The event has to take the extra effort to be an inclusive space.

Funding has always raised tough questions.
Every event of this nature finds it challenging to raise adequate funds. While acknowledging that the financial support of the government has been the mainstay of the event, it must also be remembered that the support can be sporadic. The challenge is to build up several durable partnerships and minimise expenses. An important partnership that we have not been able to achieve till date is participation and funding support from the Kochi Corporation and the local community. In major art events, it is the business community that comes forward to provide financial support.



Sonic Droplets by Haegue Yang (2022); and (left) V. Venu.
(SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

The role museums and art centres play in society.
Art centres are critical spaces for expression, exploration and exhibition. They provide a platform for emerging artists and every city benefits from their creation and maintenance. Museums can also be dynamic spaces, playing a vital role in the cultural scene of the community. At KMB, we have showcased interesting spaces as vibrant venues for exhibitions, and this time our highlight is the Bastian Bungalow, a protected monument of the Archaeology department and an important venue for our programmes.

— Surya Praphulla Kumar

A stairwell with Scottish artist Jim Lambie’s artwork *Zobop*; (right) Slavs and Tatars’ installation (2022)

CONTINUED FROM
» PAGE 1

SCAFFOLDING THE FUTURE

Chopra and team have also enshrined collaboration in their approach – through what he calls “friendship economies” in the curatorial note for this edition, coming together under the theme *For the Time Being*. “We do not create in isolation,” he explains. “We create together. And when we create together, an artist’s practice, in a sense, creates an ecosystem around that practice.”

He’s also thinking about the sustainability of a community, “of quite literally putting food on the table,” he adds, bringing up another word from his curatorial note: “scaffolding”. “Because at the end of the day we recognise that what we do is artistic and promotional, but it’s also professional, and there are various economies that are connected to it. We are going to work with this feeling of love, trust, solidarity, camaraderie, coexistence in our shared politics, for where we think the world should be – as the engine and as the fuel.”

Art as soft power
Where the world is, is of course a different question. On the one hand is the perceived threat of AI on the art world – like everything else. But, to Chopra, an artist sending in a grammatically correct proposal is not the same as an artist letting technology do the heavy lifting. “We talked about that when the Internet came around, when large servers were running these machines for us. We’ve questioned our relationship to technology from an ethical place. But at the end of the day, we are crippled today without the Internet. So I don’t have an ethical issue with technology.”

On the other hand is art’s growing position as soft power around the globe – the UAE’s emerging scene is a most visible example of art’s place in geopolitics. “It’s definitely exploding,” muses Chopra, “but I think it’s also laundering people’s consciences. I feel like we do the washing of people’s souls. Even with the developments happening in Delhi, Mumbai, Singapore, it really does feel like we are placing contemporary art as a very valuable part of contemporary culture, just as much as music, cinema and various other forms of expression.”

The Indian art world, specifically, appears to be in a boisterous phase, fuelled by an elastic calendar of fairs and festivals and projections about appetites that seem to go in only one direction: up. But Chopra’s been here before, given that his own coming of age coincided with Indian contemporary art’s last big boom in 2007-08. “We occupied large museum spaces, like the Centre de Pompidou in Paris, Serpentine in London, the Mori Museum in Tokyo,” he remembers. “A lot of us would be talking to each other about how the scene in India is only going to change if India becomes an exciting venue for international art, and a site for an international artist to come and create an exhibit. I think Riyas [Komu] and Bose [Krishnamachari] felt that in Kerala, and I felt that here in Goa.”

If that period was the crucible in which institutions such as the Biennale and HH Art Spaces were forged, he is optimistic about this moment, with its rise of institutional patronage, for one reason. “This is also a way of creating a critical mass of people who can find an important place for contemporary art in their lives.”

Elsewhere, textiles talk

One Zero Eight, the concept design space by social impact organisation Save The Loom, is curating and collaborating multidisciplinary works, including installations, conversations, and masterclasses during the Biennale’s 110 days. One of the key works will be the launch of a global exhibit, *Patterns of Love*, curated by textile artist Odette Blum and writer-curator Sharon Drijanski. It will bring together 15 global textile artists in a collective exploration where art becomes a bridge between times, cultures, and sensibilities.

At the One Zero Eight

What to expect in Kochi

A dynamic biennale: “We wanted to deflect this idea of the finished biennale,” says Chopra. “I don’t necessarily feel the need for it to be this static museum experience. It has to be a shape-shifting, metamorphic experience that people can have.”

A smaller biennale?: “We’ve made some things smaller — the number of artworks that require shipping in from abroad, works overly reliant on technology, works that are too delicate and need a lot of air conditioning. But the number of venues has grown, there are new sites and spaces,” he says. “While the number of invitations that have gone out is only about 70, the number of collaborative practices within those is increasing. A lot of artists are occupying a larger footprint in these spaces. So if anything, it’s bigger.”

The world is invited: “I hesitate to use the word Global South because I find it extremely problematic but we’ve invited artists from countries on the other side of the economic hemisphere. Of course, South Asia is important to us, but so is Southeast Asia, South America and the African continent. Even from the United States, we’ve looked at voices that are on the margins. And then from India, we’ve invited a lot of very young, new, fresh, unseen talent. They know these conditions because it’s home ground and a young artist has a lot of tenacity. So we’ve invited them out of their little studios in Baroda, Ahmedabad, Shantiniketan, Assam, Kolkata, Patiala.”

Role of the artist
If the art world at large is evolving rapidly, his own relationship with art making has changed too. “I didn’t really think I had a studio-based practice. My studio was my place for me to chill, think, write, read, research, but it was never really a space for me to rehearse, draw, paint, work,” says Chopra. “My Berlin experience that led to me coming to Goa made me realise that it’s very important for me to have a corporeal relationship with my practice if I am to continue my relationship to performance.”

What perhaps remains unchanged, in Chopra’s mind, however, is the role of the artist in a tumultuous world. “It’s like the idea of India being a spiritual country is still quite prevalent in the West. And this projection of exotic India, internationally, is really bothersome,” he says. “We’re not the most spiritual country in the world. We’re not the most yogic. We’re not the biggest vegetarians. Actually, our diets are pathetic. Our relationship to religion is warped. Our relationship to spirituality is bling. And there’s more hatred and anger in India today than I’ve ever seen.”

“So what are we talking about?” he continues. “I guess voices of contemporary artists become a way for people to have a critical engagement with the place. And that’s the work we’re doing: blurring between states, people, gender, class, caste, culture, sexuality, identity. We are those people and we create those spaces, where you can come and feel safe and really express yourself. Have a cry, and we will cry with you.”

The Kochi-Muziris Biennale is scheduled to take place from December 12, 2025 to March 31, 2026.

The writer is an independent journalist based in Mumbai, writing on culture, lifestyle and technology.

Expected footfall: 1 million

This will always be a People’s Biennale and every visitor is encouraged to ‘sponsor’ it in some way, says Thomas Varghese

Lull by Anju Acharya (2022); and (below) Thomas Varghese.
(SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

Thomas Varghese, CEO, Kochi Biennale Foundation, who comes with extensive international experience — a stint with the United Nations included — wants to put the “local in the global” this time. He reiterates that this will always be “the People’s Biennale”. Between Aspinwall House (the portion owned by the government) and Anand Warehouse, more than 20 venues will be activated in December, with Bastion Bungalow being the site of the Pavilion.

Entry is via a “sponsorship receipt of ₹100-₹150, instead of a ‘ticket’ to be consistent with the ethos of the People’s Biennale”. Of the ₹30 crore budget, ₹7 crore has been announced by the government as support. There are also five confirmed Platinum Benefactors, as part of a new programme to provide funding to the Biennale and to strengthen the Foundation, but CSR grants and local sponsorships are encouraged as well. More from Varghese:

About working with local brands.
We have been engaging this time with the Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) Kochi Refinery, which has a strong base here, to contribute to the local culture of the city via the Biennale. We are also looking at naming some of the venues after companies that want to come in as a sponsor. Also local members such as David Hall and Pepper House are on board as they believe these events are important to the historic aspect of the city, besides helping with tourism.

Starting with a clean slate.
I have worked in multiple places but the scale and complexity of this initiative is humongous. It is important to create a semblance of order and systems that undergird the Biennale. There is a lot that is going on, with artists, facilitators, donors, venues, and the government, all to be connected to the matrix. With reference to pending payments, we have managed to clean the slate from the past, systematically. All the payments have been made and there are no vendors left waiting. Moving forward we want to make sure that wherever we have signed a contract, we will honour that.

Open call to collaborators.
The merchandise store is open for collaboration as is the cafeteria. I am looking to include Kochi Kudumbashree [the state-sponsored women empowerment programme] so it is affordable and accessible. We are not just looking out for attendees from other States and countries but local walk-ins too. We had 800,000 visitors last time and are expecting a million over four months.

— Rosella Stephen

GREEN HUMOUR

Rohan Chakravarty

REDDYMADE THEORY OF BELONGING

Suchi Reddy brings her penchant for stories and neuroaesthetics into her work — be it homes, furniture, or her numerous art installations displayed across the globe

Manju Sara Rajan

Architect Suchi Reddy and I have been friends for more than a decade. She lives in New York, the founder of Reddymade studio; I live in India. I joke that I follow her work around the world. In 2023, we met in Dhaka during the art summit, where she presented the installation *Between Earth and Sky*. Then in December 2024, in Mumbai, when she unveiled *Chromacosm*, an installation created in collaboration with Asian Paints to celebrate the launch of the brand’s Chromacosm colour library – the world’s largest architectural paint system featuring more than 5,300 shades. We then met about a month later in Mumbai at the debut of the Architecture and Design Film Festival, where *Chromacosm* was showcased again.

It was during this last meeting, over dinner at the Vetro in Oberoi Hotel, that she asked me: “When was the last time you felt a sense of belonging?” What ensued was a conversation about family, community, friendship and making place for oneself in the world. *Bias and Belonging* – the former a way to ‘other’, the latter, a possessive – was also the name of a large community project she presented at the Colgate University in upstate New York in April. The exhibit contained woven, textual and digital elements representing what she’d learned from community conversations with students, faculty and staff. It is the typical approach of this Chennai-born architect. She likes stories, she wants to understand, she’s an intent listener, a watcher.

Reddymade has an impressive list of clients – from high-end homes to brands such as Google and Humanscale. The most recent of her many public installations is *Turbulence 2025* for the Brooklyn Botanic Garden where she used research on plant acoustics to create an interactive installation comprised of reflective metal panels serenaded by a haunting ethereal soundscape. In early September, Reddy will present *Patterns of Protection*, a spatial response to the curatorial brief at the debut edition of the Bukhara Biennial.

There is a common element of empathy that runs through all of Reddy’s works, whether private or public. For years now, the primary focus of her work has revolved around neuroaesthetics, exploring how spaces can be orchestrated to influence the occupants’ feelings. In a conversation shortly before her Bukhara trip, she speaks about her work and its evolution:

Storyteller in action (Clockwise from above) *Chromacosm*; *Becoming*; *Shaped by Air*; Suchi Reddy; Salt Point house; NINE.5 with Ekaya Banaras; *Me + You*; *Autophysiopsychopoetic*; and *Turbulence*. (CHRISTINA HIRUKAWA, MINH T., CHLOE HORSEMAN, ASHOK SINHA, ADIL HASAN, ALYSSA SCHUKAR, SIEGFRIED MUELLER PHOTOGRAPHY, AND GABRIELLE BEAUMONT)

Question: *How does your Indian heritage find its way into your practice?*
Answer: The sensuality and sophistication of the South Indian aesthetic sensibility is deep in my design DNA. The beautiful light transitions in our layered traditional architecture, the simple, minimal material transitions, the texture in our crafts, the luxuriousness of our textiles, and the fragrance of our flowers all find expression in my work – whether it’s architecture, interiors, objects, or art.

Q: *How has your parents’ Chennai home, and your mother’s relationship with colour, impacted your work?*
A: I owe my design chops to my mother. She came from a small village in Andhra Pradesh, never went to school, but mastered six languages, and introduced so many design elements into my first environment, the house I grew up in. It was designed by renowned architect P.S. Govind Rao, and his Japanese-Indian sensibility created a home that opened to gardens, leaving a deep impression on me. My mother had an incredible sense of colour; one of our favourite rituals was a visit to the storied Nalli’s to find unusual saris. She also took me with her to weavers in Kanchipuram where she would have saris woven.

Q: *What is your relationship with colour?*
A: Colour to me is structural, it’s not two-dimensional. The blue of the sky, for instance, is not a colour; it’s a refraction and distribution of light. I use colour in the same way I use light – to enhance materiality, space and contrast. I listen carefully to my client’s experiences with colour because it is a primal factor that everyone has an opinion on and reaction to. Colour is also deeply cultural. Working in so many countries and cultures now, I find its nuances in each place fascinating. With *Chromacosm*, my solution was a ‘black space’ [black is what you get when you mix all paints] filled with pixels of colour, like some of our ancient tantric paintings.

Q: *How does the work of hand and technology reconcile?*
A: Craft and craftsmanship are essential to making our world, whether it’s an app or an age-old handicraft. We need to value both more, particularly in the age of AI. The collective and generational wisdom of craft, especially in countries like India and Japan, is a treasure. I recently launched a collectible furniture line called NINE.5 with Ekaya Banaras. Named for the number of yards in a sari, the lines of the collection mimic the wrapping of the garment around the body. The pattern is a series of zeros; an ode to [mathematician and astronomer] Brahmagupta’s contribution to mathematics in 685 AD, foregrounded and superimposed on a herringbone, a representation of our colonial heritage.

In interiors and architecture, I find every opportunity to highlight Indian craft, such as [textile label] Morii Design for example, whose work I curated for a show in New York.

Q: *How central is neuroaesthetics to your work?*
A: Neuroaesthetics is a multidisciplinary field that focuses on understanding the effects of our environments and experiences on our brains and bodies. My research in this area has affected my approach to everything. My mantra is ‘form follows feeling’, which means that whether I am designing a home, office, institution, or object, my aim is to draw from art and science to create something that makes people feel great, at peace, and grounded.

In residential projects, I look at how to create spaces for refuge and comfort using information from studies on texture and colour; in spaces for focus or creativity, I curate intentionally proportioned views through windows or images that can help that work. For instance, in the Salt Point house in New York, the top of the windows align with eye level, making it a very intentional viewing into nature. In retail spaces such as the Google store in New York City, all the textures, materials and colours are organised so that the customer can exhale and enjoy wonder and discovery. The floor is soft, and the furniture is made of cork, which mimics the body’s temperature, and minimises experiential friction.

Q: *Are you working on any projects in India?*
A: I am working on two projects, both very different. One is a house for my sister in a village near Tirupati, nestled inside giant rocks, built with local materials and craftsmen. The other, in Hyderabad, is a cultural campus of three buildings with residences and an art gallery, the whole of which is designed as a sculpture. It will feature commissioned artworks by Indian artists in all media. I love working in India, not just because it is home, but because of the way the mix of craft and skilled labour allows me to innovate.

The writer is a lifestyle and arts editor, who launched the Indian edition of Architectural Digest.

THE HINDU magazine
Sunday, August 31, 2025

IN CONVERSATION

AZMET JAH: OLD GLORY, NEW INDIA

Jah reflects on family, heritage, and the future of the Nizam legacy in Hyderabad

Azmet Jah is the ninth Nizam of Hyderabad. (SIDDHANT THAKUR)

Serish Nanisetti
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The Chowmahalla Palace in Hyderabad is a half-kilometre stretch of opulent buildings, arcaded walkways, lush gardens, and reflective pools. Once the symbolic seat of the Nizams, who ruled from 1724 to 1948, it was described by author Isabel Burton in 1876 as "at least a mile long, covered with delicate tracery", where "many a mosque, like lacework, rose here and there".

Past a reflecting pool stands the gilded Afzal Mahal palace, off-limits within the ticketed tourist site. Inside is Azmet Jah – who, on January 25, 2023, was declared the ninth Nizam of Hyderabad after his father, Mukarram Jah Bahadur, passed away days earlier, on January 10, in Istanbul. The crowning was a family affair inside the Khilwat, the seat of power in the Nizam's dominion till 1948 when Hyderabad became a part of India. This became a matter of dispute as other claimants to the family title, citing descent from the Nizam's family, began jockeying for the title. A title without a kingdom.

Inside Afzal Mahal palace, Jah, who has also been a photographer and cinematographer and has worked with the likes of Spielberg and Attenborough, resembles less a royal and more a wealthy banker heading to work, with his platinum hair, boat shoes, and a touchscreen watch. Known to friends as Pasha, the 64-year-old divides his time between London, Turkey and Hyderabad. He reflects on the past, present, and future of his dynasty in an interview with the *Magazine*. Edited excerpts:

Question: *What brings you here?*
Answer: This is my home. I have friends and wonderful memories here. Few people know when I am in town. I can't go out and say, 'Hey, look at me, I'm back, I'm the Nizam.' People know who I am now. This time, I was here for Muharram.

Q: *How do you connect with your family's legacy – and with the city? Your grandfather and those before him were all in Hyderabad.*
A: It's in the blood, whether I like it or not. When I stepped up to make the offering during the Muharram procession of *alams* [battle standards] on an elephant, I could sense the people's affection.

Q: *You're connected to both the Ottoman dynasty (your grandmother Durrushehvar was the daughter of the last Caliph Abdul Mejid II) and the Nizams.*
A: I've spent far more time in Turkey than in India. It's hard to say where I truly belong – I am part Turkish, part Indian. When people ask where I'm from, I usually say I'm Turkish. I don't look Indian. If I walked around Hyderabad with my cameras, people would assume I'm another tourist.

Q: *You have been a photographer and cinematographer. Are you working on anything new currently?*
A: I'm working on a documentary about my great-grandfather, Osman Ali Khan, who's been ill-served by scurrilous talk. I was not happy with the research that was done earlier and I am looking for a young person to come onboard and put my vision on the screen.

Q: *You nearly got arrested in Turkey in the late 90s?*
A: Yes, my father wanted to find Noah's tomb, in Cizre, near the Syrian border. We drove there unaware that it was known for terrorism and drug smuggling. We were pulled over by a man with a gun who said, "You're not allowed to film or photograph." They didn't believe we had driven from Antalya just to see Noah's tomb.

Q: *Was the tomb there? Do you think it was Noah's tomb?*
A: Yes, that's what the inscription said.

Q: *Describe the time you spent in Hyderabad.*
A: We spent Christmas vacations in Hyderabad. Our favourite place was Chiran Palace, from where we'd ride down to Golconda Fort or be taken on an elephant. Once, my sister was asked at school what pets she had. She said she had a pet elephant, Alfred, in her garden. The headmistress called my mother, and said, "You have to tell your daughter to stop lying; she keeps saying she has an elephant in her garden." My mother, Princess Esra, replied, "Yes, she does have an elephant in her garden."

Q: *How do you see your legacy in Hyderabad?*
A: I think my father made a few mistakes when he went to Australia, and things went downhill with a series of bad financial advice and legal problems about various properties. But, in 1996, when I got married, my parents spoke for the first time in 20 years. I think my father asked my mother to help restore Chowmahalla and Falaknuma, and we agreed as a family to do it. So, when you ask about legacy, it is taking that forward. My son is also aware of his responsibility. The legacy continues not just through restoration, but also socially – I plan to expand schools and our involvement in education.

Q: *Do you feel a sense of loss when you go to KBR park or Chiran Palace?*
A: Yes, I grew up in that park. It was part of the house grounds. We had picnics there, and explored the forest. My father taught me to drive there. But it was sold off in 2006 to the state government. It feels sad knowing that the house is gone, but the park belongs to the people. Hyderabad has become a concrete jungle, so the park is a blessing.

GOREN BRIDGE

The right play at the right time

East-West vulnerable, South deals

Bob Jones

South held up his ace on the opening king of clubs lead but won the club queen continuation. East playing the eight and the 10 made it a certainty that West held the missing clubs. South had opened the bidding one club and that would need a pretty good suit to lead and then continue clubs. South cashed the ace of spades and led a spade to dummy's king, then cashed the queen of spades, West discarding a low diamond.

South had eight top tricks and took a moment to decide which redsuit finesse to take for his ninth, knowing that if he lost the finesse, West would cash enough club tricks to defeat him. South decided not to take either finesse and led dummy's remaining club instead. West won and cashed two more club tricks, South discarding a low heart and a low diamond. West now had the unhappy choice of leading a red suit and there was no winning choice. South had nine tricks regardless of which suit West led. Nicely played.

Note that cashing a fourth spade before exiting dummy with a club would have been fatal to the contract. South would have no good discard on the last club and West would then have a winning choice. Try it for yourself.

NORTH
♠ K Q J 5
♡ A 8 6
◇ 8 5 2
♣ 7 5 4

WEST
♠ 10 7
♡ Q 9 3
◇ K 4 3
♣ K Q J 9 3

EAST
♠ 8 6 4 3
♡ 10 7 4
◇ J 10 9 7
♣ 10 8

SOUTH
♠ A 9 2
♡ K J 5 2
◇ A Q 6
♣ A 6 2

The bidding:

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1♣	Pass	1♠	Pass
2NT	Pass	3NT	All pass

Opening lead: King of ♣

QUIZ

Easy like Sunday morning

Eponyms return!

French sailors named this Caribbean island after St. Lucy. (GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO)

Berty Ashley

1 On August 31, 1895, German Count Ferdinand von _____ obtained the patent for his invention, the 'navigable balloon'. The name became synonymous with long-distance flight until the end of the First World War. By what name are all airships known, which even inspired a rock band?

2 Born on August 31, 1870, Maria ______ was an Italian physician who devised a philosophy of education that is used in schools worldwide. She developed a system that emphasises hands-on learning and encourages a child's natural curiosity. What is the name of this method?

3 Born on August 31, 1907, Ramon _____ was a Filipino nautical engineer who eventually became the President of the Philippines. He was considered a defender of democracy until his untimely death in 1957. The same year, an award was established in his name to honour courageous people who work to help democracy. What is the name of the award?

4 This island in the eastern Caribbean is the only one in the world to be named after a woman who is not a goddess. After French sailors were shipwrecked there on the feast day of St. Lucy, they named it in her honour. By what name do we know this country?

5 Ernst Wenzel __ was an Austrian physicist whose studies helped us understand shock waves. To celebrate his contribution to the field, the ratio of an object's speed to the speed of sound in the surrounding medium is named after him. What 'number' is this?

6 *Pamphilus de amore* is a 12th-century Latin comedic play about a character called Pamphilus, who falls in love with Galathea but doesn't do anything about it. It was a very popular poem, so it was widely circulated as a slim volume of writing. What word comes into the English language from this character's name?

7 The name of this iconic religious building comes from the fact that it was commissioned by Pope Sixtus IV. In Latin, it is known as 'Sacellum Sixtinum', which means 'Sixtus's Chapel'. By what name do we better know this building?

8 In the 1960 film *La Dolce Vita* by Federico Fellini, Walter Santesso plays a character who is a hyperactive photographer. His name comes from the Italian slang for 'mosquito', as he is constantly hovering and darting around. The plural of his name lives on in English as what word?

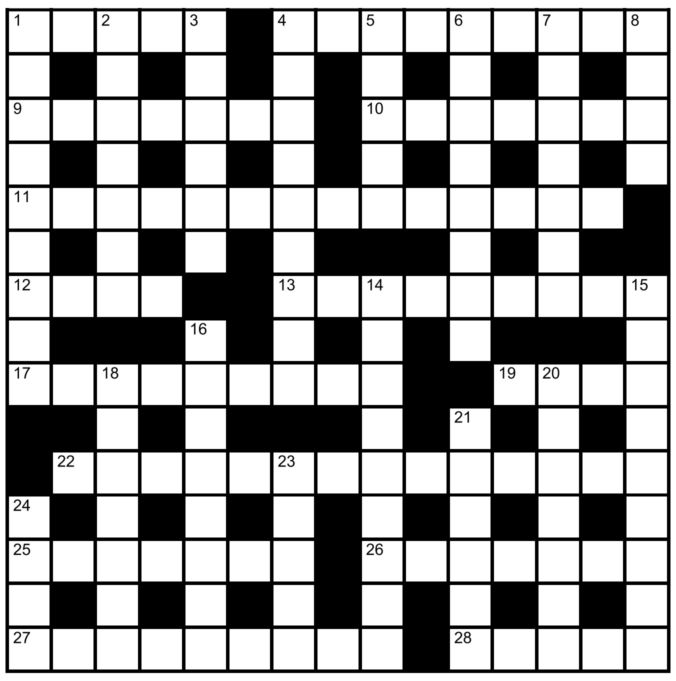
9 _____ of Savoy was Queen of Italy from 1878 to 1900. During her reign, she had many things named after her, including a town in Assam, a battleship, and a mountain peak in Africa. The most popular, though, is a food item that has red tomatoes, green basil, and white cheese to represent the Italian flag. What item is this?

10 The most common monkey species in India is the Rhesus Macaque. The French naturalist Audebert named it after the mythological king Rhesus of Thrace from the *Iliad*. In 1939, two biologists discovered an antigen factor in monkeys and came up with a system to classify blood groups. What factor is this that gets its name from the monkeys?

A molecular biologist from Madurai, our quizmaster enjoys trivia and music, and is working on a rock ballad called 'Coffee is a Drink, Kaapi is an Emotion'. @bertyashley

Answers
1. Zeppelin
2. Montessori
3. Ramon Magsaysay Award
4. St. Lucia
5. Mach
6. Pamphlet
7. Sistine Chapel
8. Paparazzi
9. Margherita pizza
10. Rh factor

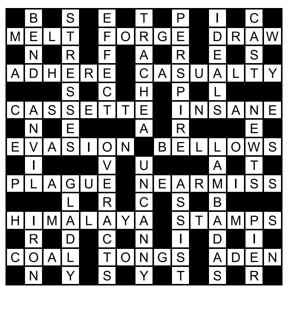
THE HINDU SUNDAY CROSSWORD #19 (Set by Gussalufz)



Across
1 Slippery slope for some Europeans (5)
4 Source of dehydration in Indian college slang (9)
9 Vehicle turns silent after dropping Gussalufz for a court thing (7)
10 Hide from the boring king (7)
11 No drug for setter in opening ceremony? (14)
12 Resort to A.I. for hint (4)
13 "Husbanding" includes our sniffing, licking, eating? (9)
17 See Vera going around incorporating French and being one irritating woman (3,6)
19 Tipping crown to one side, emperor makes love (4)
22 "Page Six" airs all debauched arrangements stars are often found in (6,8)
25 Colourful singers of traditional pieces played regularly (7)
26 Couple's biannual displays of a special love (7)
27 Reject birds from Spooner's rotating skewers (9)
28 Arc of smoke over Vatican City (5)

Down
1 Manoeuvre through atmosphere of anger involving top under secretary (9)
2 Luck too, engineered an escalation in labour dispute (7)
3 React to glare from queen when wearing, say, pride shirt (6)
4 Rising youngster humbles record holders (9)
5 Crack that's very large and very close to fuselage (5)
6 Delineating a landmark's edges, touch up sketch (5,3)
7 African crash anticipated, to an extent (7)
8 Stretch limits in torture room (4)
14 They can change bad parts via laser surgery (9)
15 Judgment from authorities implicating outsiders initially seen suspiciously (4,5)
16 Sleeping bags of top quality abruptly snagging? Peculiar (8)
18 Unkempt, i.e., run- down houses with fewer inhabitants (7)
20 Current discharge reported in coach (7)
21 Analyse the speed of light; it's useful for measuring long distances (6)
23 Girl has one drink (5)
24 Egg with spoilage surrounding base (4)

SOLUTION NO. 18



Motorcycle diaries from the crowded urban jungle

Lakshmi R. Srinivas
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For enthusiasts, the motorcycle is a piece of art in motion. There is nothing more exhilarating than a motorcycle ride with the wind rushing through your hair as you zip through traffic, like the twists and turns in a crime thriller.

So, when I see hundreds of two-wheelers trying to do just that today, I feel a certain empathy for them. Their activities will make for an adventure saga. The city or town is not important, because it is a universal phenomenon on our roads.

Think of all the vehicles trying to get to their destination as early as possible. Many of the two-wheelers are in even more of a hurry. You see them wind through the lines of cars waiting impatiently for the green signal, and land up in front of all of them in a phalanx. What does it matter if they brush against or break a vehicle's side mirror? They even hog the left lane on a free left turn, making the lefties wait, pretending to be tone deaf to the frantic honking or the yells of the more enraged or enterprising of the affected car drivers.

When the signal turns green, they rush forward like their life depended on it and leave the larger vehicles behind. There are those two-wheelers which overtake left-turning cars from the left. The car drivers then have their heart in their mouth as they barely miss a collision.

The more adventurous motorcyclists carry on long conversations while they drive, head tilted to one side to hold on to their mobile. I have often wondered whether they end up with spondylitis? The conversation is carried out at the top of their voice, so bystanders for miles across can hear all about their work and expertise, and all that is going on in their life and that of their family and friends. In one case, a motorcyclist shouted out his address and phone number to the person at the other end, and I remembered both for several months, though I am not a suspicious criminal who uses such information to land the shouter in trouble. The "family two-wheeler" is a sight to behold. The motorcyclist usually has a helmet, and there is his helmetless spouse and two youngsters of various ages, perched nonchalantly on the pillion and sometimes one in front of Papa, blithely talking and breathing in the traffic fumes. Sometimes, the children pretend to be an aeroplane, their arms flapping as other vehicles go by. As for the Heer-and-Ranjha couples, the less said about their antics, the better.

One thing I have learnt from these sights and sounds on our roads, is that we Indians believe strongly in destiny or fate. The concept of tempting fate is not on our radar.

Bernstein, Broadway, and a musical awakening

The composer's sweeping and syncopated rhythms and aching melodies gave emotional depth to *West Side Story*, a tale of love and violence, of youth and loss

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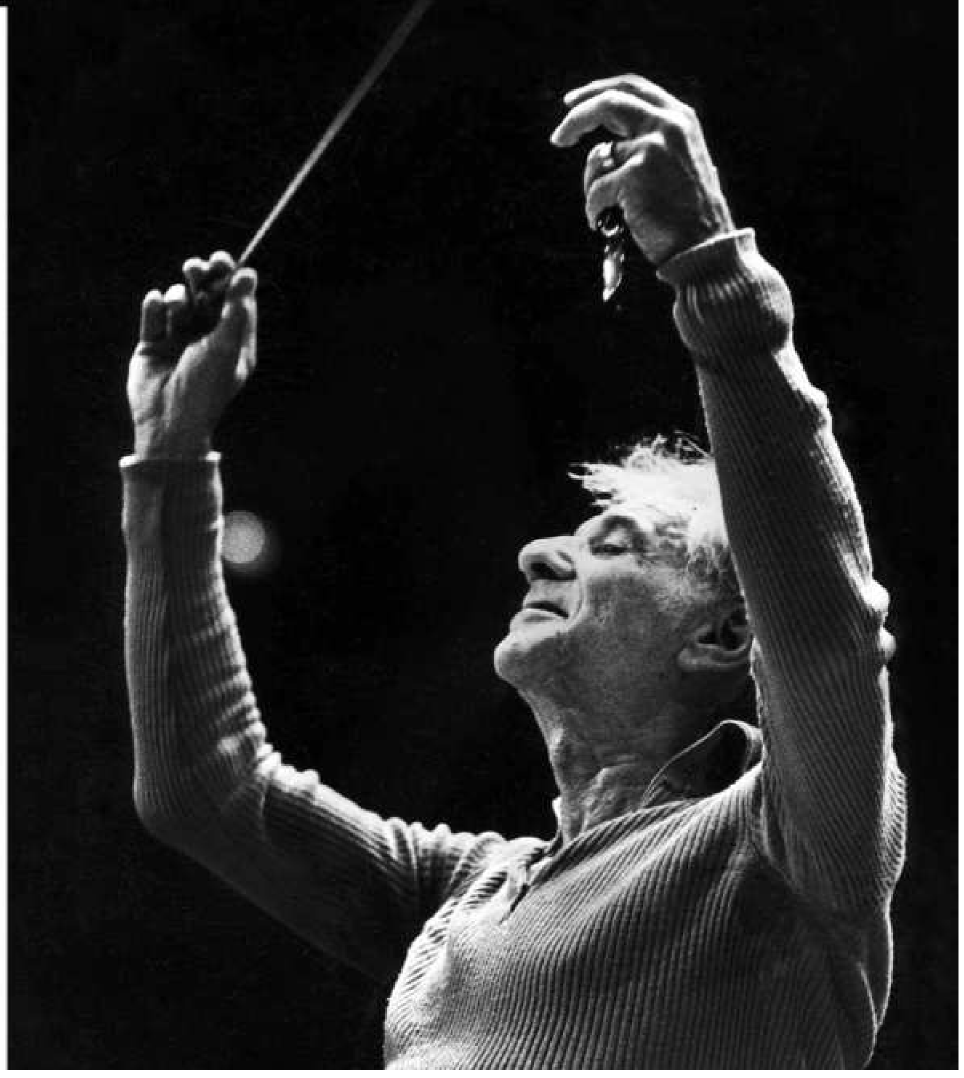

A moving biopic of Leonard Bernstein, *Maestro*, took me back across the decades to *West Side Story*, a film I first saw over 50 years ago. His music left a vivid impression on me, even at that young age. The movement, the raw emotion was unlike anything I had experienced before. I did not have the words then to describe what I was feeling, but the effect was undeniable. That early brush with Bernstein, a conductor, composer, and cultural force who brought symphonic music into public life, changed the way I would forever engage with music, theatre, storytelling, and perhaps, in some small way, with the world itself.

It was Bernstein's score that had lingered in memory all these years, those sweeping, syncopated rhythms and aching melodies that gave emotional depth to a story of love and violence, of youth and loss. A successful Broadway Musical in 1957 and adapted to a film in 1961, *West Side Story* turned into a cinematic triumph that redefined the genre of musical film. With a daring brilliance, the film transposes Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* onto the persevering streets of mid-century New York. Instead of Capulets and Montagues, we have the Jets and the Sharks, the two rival gangs divided not by family but by race and immigration. It is the white working-class youth pitched against Puerto Rican newcomers, as love turns to rebellion and dance metamorphoses into defiance.

Bernstein's score amalgamates classical composition with jazz, Latin rhythms, and street vernacular, a daring musical fusion that captures the disquiet of a generation. Songs such as *Maria*, *Tonight*, *America*, and *Somewhere*, more than melodies, are emotional and political sites, conjuring longing, division, hope, and despair in a symphony of pulsating music with all the contradictions that generate meaning rather than reach reconciliation.

What makes *West Side Story* endure is its ability to reflect on the fractures within society emerging out of racial prejudice, economic marginalisation, and the yearning for belonging. Its tragedy is not only confined to lovers torn by fate but also to entire communities locked in cycles of violence, misapprehension, and exclusion. The film, in that sense, was ahead of its time. Even today, it feels disconcertingly current in the racist politics of Trump and the hardcore right wing.

Powerful art

Looking back, I realise how deeply it exemplified Bernstein's own view of art not as something that gives easy answers, but as something that opens up a space where thought itself becomes active. Even in my young days, I had sensed that I was watching something meant to move and disturb, not to reassure. That encounter stayed with me as a reminder that powerful art unsettles us, and in that disturbance, it begins to anchor us amid life's turbulence.

My experience of *West Side Story* and Bernstein's music is inseparable from the layers of history and identity that I have related to in my reading over the years of Edward Said's eloquent books *Musical Elaborations* and *Culture and Imperialism*, where he reminds us that art is never simply entertainment, but a battleground where power, memory, and belonging intersect, as experienced in Giuseppe Verdi's opera, a compelling reading of opera as a cultural form deeply enmeshed in imperial ideologies and historical power relations. Like Said, Bernstein does not merely appreciate opera or the musical genre as an aesthetic experience; instead, he interrogates how it becomes a site of political meaning, especially in the age of racist politics.

Bernstein's score captures this tension vibrantly in a soundscape of fractured communities and inharmonious worlds, much like the diasporic and marginalised lives Said often wrote about. Listening to Bernstein now, I feel more than just the drama of a love story. I feel the echoes of displacement and the nostalgia for a home that may never fully exist. His music is a personal dialogue for me, an amplification on the fissures and hopes that shape our lives, and a testament to art's power to divulge and struggle against the multifaceted realities of identity and conflict.

In retrospect after more than half a century, *West Side Story* taught me a lesson that no textbook ever could, a lesson that art does not simply reflect life, it catechises it, breaks it open, uncovers its fault lines. Bernstein once said, "A work of art does not answer questions, it provokes them. And these answers really come out of contradictions, out of counterpoints, out of tensions." *West Side Story* is indeed an impeccable quintessence of that principle with its bequest lying not just in its novelty, but also in its dogged honesty, its refusal to simplify, and its persistence on the emotional and political complexity of being human.

FEEDBACK

Letters to the Magazine can be e-mailed separately to mag.letters@thehindu.co.in by Tuesday 3 p.m.

Cover story

Palliative care can be included in school and college curricula, and students should be trained and encouraged to volunteer in caring for the elderly and the needy. ('The empathy effect, How Kerala's young are stepping up'; Aug. 24) Through NSS, NCC, and programmes such as 'Adopt a Grandparent', we can also create a generation that values social responsibility, dignity, and care for the elderly.

N.S. Reddy

Forgotten underbelly

The flattering title of 'City of Joy' for Kolkata does not conceal its underbelly, where the poor struggle for daily existence ('Chronicles of Life à la Byapari'; Aug. 24). Beyond the dazzle of Bengal's cultural and literary riches, one cannot ignore the life of the poor, living virtually on the streets or in 'bastis' tucked between posh and older localities.

Saurabh Sinha

Breaking stigma

The article ('The judgement-free divorce camp'; Aug. 24) was a powerful reminder to break preconceptions and an undeniable testament to the audacity and tenacity of voices long silenced. Such camps can provide opportunities for connection and help participants develop a sense of belonging.

Sajna Hameed

Humane coexistence

Anand Krishnan's ROAR is giving disabled dogs a second chance at life through specially designed wheelchairs, proving they can live with dignity after accidents or abuse. ('Anand Krishnan: joy and second chances'; Aug. 31) Adoption, legal protection, and proper implementation of the ABC (Animal Birth Control) programme with immunisation and awareness are essential for humane control of stray dog numbers and peaceful coexistence in residential areas.

Monita Sutherson

Flawed logic

The article by I.Y.R. Krishna Rao, former chief secretary of Andhra Pradesh, says "elites seem to not understand," thereby inferring that he is not an elite but represents the masses. ('Pen up stray dogs across India'; Aug. 24) This is preposterous, as the IAS/IPS, thanks to the Raj, remain isolated in colonial bungalows with power, resources and expertise, far from the struggles of the people. Ordinary folk, especially the poor, love and care for street dogs who give them emotional support, yet are blamed despite data showing only 0.15 dog-related incidents daily compared to 100 rapes, 80 murders and 20 dowry deaths. We should strengthen weak institutions and leave the innocent dogs alone — the real solution is vaccination and sterilisation.

Dharanidharan Selvam

Evergreen superstar

No praise can be too high for Rajinikanth, the superstar. At 74, after five decades in films, still drawing huge crowds is truly amazing. ('Rajinikanth and the cost of stardom'; Aug. 24) A wonderful human being with great style, he is explosive on screen and a true inspiration for generations.

Balasubramaniam Pavani

MORE ON THE WEB

www.thehindu.com/opinion/open-page

In search of an identity
For those who live a peripatetic existence, the concept of permanent residence is something foreign
Sushil Prasad

Rethinking student-teacher relationships
Sometimes, true connection lies in restraint, as educators' role is to inspire, not indulge
Sujitha K.

Ridesharing woes
Travelling during peak hours has become a veritable nightmare
S. Radha Prathi

An enlightening walk
The rain and gloomy sky conspire to make it an unforgettable outing
Nanditha Ashok

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Lots in a name

While naming children, Indian parents are aware of the long-term implications and do not seek to drive a personal agenda or stamp their individuality on the little ones

ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES

Elon Musk and wife Grimes named their son X Æ A-12. It threw precedence to the winds, stood out from the clutter, and told public opinion where it got off. In short, it's very Elon Muskish! You would think the Musks made their choice in a rush of whimsy and cared a hoot about the consequences. Actually, they cared greatly. Weeks after the naming, they rang in a change, opting instead for X Æ A-XII (as if that helps!).

In India, parents are a lot more mainstream. When it comes to naming their offspring, they are aware of the long-term implications of their act. They are not seeking to drive a personal agenda or stamp their individuality on the little one. They are also solicitous about what happens later. Will other children make fun of their child in school? Often, you do not go solo with so important a matter. Grandparents, uncles, aunts and assorted denizens across the family tree need to have their say. As does the zodiac, the season of birth, and phonetics. Traditionally in India, it's felt that boys are better off with names of four syllables and girls of three.

Of late, however, some parents have begun to think out of the box – in fact, so far out of the box that they are in a bracket by themselves. No longer content with any Tara, Dilip or Hari, parents have come up with uncommon proposals, many ending with the raging hot favourite "aan". The choice is wide: Vivaan, Kiaan, Ziaan, Rihaan, Hridhaan, Nirvaan...

You will probably be shaking your head in bewilderment – shouldn't the names mean something? Actually, they all do – only, you need a Ph.D. in Sanskrit to understand the cosmic significance couched within the consonants.

Sanskrit, Swahili or slang, there is a lot riding on the choice you make. Names are so tightly woven into our sense of self that you are virtually bequeathing character and destiny to the little one. A study published in an American journal of psychology found that people with easily pronounceable names were more likely to receive job offers than those with names less easy on the tongue. It makes sense – unless, of course, the interviewers themselves have odd names. In that case, they will gladly reach out to a kindred soul.

Blaming the name

Years later, when you are in an introspective mood and if life has not quite panned out the way you expect, you generally conduct a self-audit. Is there something wrong with your face or your race, your address or the way you dress? After these usual suspects, the needle eventually points to your name. It is seductive to imagine that we would have had a different future if we had a different name. But effecting a change so late in the day involves a lot of bother. You then hit upon a via media – the old name tweaked with value additions. Experts in the game assure you that an extra 'a' or omitting an 'e' can tilt the balance decisively in your favour. It's a con trick you play on the universe, but it is still better than doing nothing.

Even if you are not unhappy with how life has treated you thus far, you could still dislike your name – and with good reason. It's as old as you are and obviously nowhere near being trendy. Worse still, you were not consulted during the short-listing. In fairness then, I propose that naming ceremonies around the world be held in abeyance until children are old enough to know what they really like. But what about those young men and women today going around with pre-selected names? Perhaps, it is worthwhile carrying out a spot survey of those who bear unusual names to find out how they feel about their parent's weird preferences. Honestly, what do you feel, Exa Dark Sidereal? That is not the Musks' favourite flavour of ice cream or type of coffee. That's their daughter's name.

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Sunday, August 31, 2025

(Clockwise from right) Kelly Sinnapah Mary's *Violette's Book The Girl with 3 Eyes*; Ricky Vasan's *Thanksgiving*; Suchitra Mattai's *Set Free*; Shyama Golden's *It's All Uphill From Here*; and Rajiv Menon at the JCA. (COURTESY JAIPUR CENTRE FOR ART AND RAJIV MENON CONTEMPORARY)

DIASPORA REFRAMED IN JAIPUR

At Jaipur's City Palace, Rajiv Menon's *Non-Residency* seeks to fill the narrative gap between India and its émigré artists

Aastha D.

The courtyards of Jaipur's City Palace have seen plenty: royal processions, polo matches, and the shimmer of courtly patronage. This month, the palace opens its doors to a peculiar exhibition – one that asks what belonging looks like when you've spent years being told you don't quite fit.

Non-Residency is presented by the Jaipur Centre for Art (JCA), a new cultural hub co-founded by Sawai Padmanabh Singh and curator Noelle Kadar to bring global conversations into the city's historic heart. Across the world in Los Angeles, Rajiv Menon launched Rajiv Menon Contemporary in 2023 and quickly drew attention with ambitious programming and museum acquisitions. Two young institutions, two cities, one show – bringing 16 South Asian and diasporic artists together to decipher "the emotional texture" of the experience of migration, immigration, and displacement.

"Non-resident" is not a romantic word. In India, NRI (Non-Resident Indian) is a legal category; in the U.S., "nonresident alien" is a tax status – both ways of filing people into forms. Menon flips the chill of paperwork into something human: "For me, it was about that uncanny in-betweenness – the way the diaspora can feel both familiar and unsettling," he says. The exhibition turns that unease into image, material, and mood. Or as he shares on the *The Creative Process* podcast, into an exploration of how the artists encounter their homeland from the position of the diaspora.

You feel the argument immediately in a pairing that shouldn't work but does. Hung near visual artist Viraj Khanna's maximalist, satirical embroideries New York-based artist Melissa Joseph's felt works look almost whisper-quiet. Based on family photos, Joseph's faces blur at the edges like the texture of memory over time and space. Khanna's panels, meanwhile, riff on the social-media image economy and the theatre of the Indian wedding; they swagger into the room and then turn the mirror. Restraint and exuberance stand shoulder to shoulder, each making the other read more clearly.

A few paces away, Boston artist Ricky Vasan's *Thanksgiving* shrinks the epic of migration down to a table and a glance – domestic, diaristic, and disarming. San Francisco-based Anoushka Mirchandani lingers on the women in her life in quiet figurative scenes, while American-Sri Lankan artist Shyama Golden plants a flag for crisp, graphic clarity in *It's All Uphill From Here*. Together, they argue that the everyday – well lit and well seen – can be as urgent as any grand narrative.

Room of sharp contrasts

Non-Residency, which encompasses paintings, sculptures and textiles, is also a conscious move away from the position of subordination that diaspora art usually finds itself in. As Menon states in the podcast, he wanted "to show that diasporic work is very much thinking in the present tense… that they're taking their position and using it to create art that are wholly original".

Multidisciplinary artist Kelly Sinnapah Mary taps into her Indo-Caribbean heritage with hybrid beings entangled in leaves and lore; her canvases feel like haunted herbariums that ask who gets to plant and who is allowed to grow. Jersey-based Sahana Ramakrishnan's *The People Under the Sea* dives into myth and metamorphosis, braiding South Asian cosmologies with a restless eco-anxious contemporary hand.

One thread runs across the show: texture treated as thought. Embroidery, cloth, tufting, and other material interventions within the artworks are not mere embellishments but carry as much weight as paint or sculpture. This sensibility reflects Menon's wider ethos – one attuned to fashion and the way many young designers use craft to generate form and meaning. "Craft, clothing, art – they've always spoken to each other in our cultures," he says. "I wanted the exhibition to reflect that conversation honestly."

You see that clearly in Canadian artist Keerat Kaur's *The Source*, a pomegranate overflowing with its symbols of fertility, sits comfortably in the space of painting, while Mirchandani's translucent wisp of a woman sits sprawled in a sari, the body disappearing into the surroundings. Here, fabric, embroidery, and collage hold their own against oil and acrylic across the galleries.

Straddling both worlds

JCA also launched an artist residency alongside the show, and the first resident, San Francisco-based artist Nibha Akireddy, used her month in Jaipur to learn block printing from local artisans and spending time in the palace's archives. Her works fold that learning straight back into the exhibition: *Night Polo* nods to the city's equestrian lore, this time with lithe women as players, while *Sleep Study 1* and *Sleep Study 2* tuck figures into block printed sheets. Public spectacle and private tenderness, side by side – homecoming as composition rather than return.

Despite the glamour of the setting, *Non-Residency* refuses to become an elite parade. Yes, there are sequins and saris and saturated colour, but the curation doesn't hide from the power structures that once dismissed these very aesthetics as unserious. The pairings are political: a high-shine Khanna beside Joseph's hush; Ramakrishnan's oceanic eco-mythologies interrupting a sumptuous room; Vasan's quiet table blown to the large scale of South Asian meals. Everywhere, the hang insists that difference is not a hierarchy.

For years, diasporic artists were presented as colourful exceptions to someone else's rulebook. *Non-Residency* offers a cleaner sentence: let the diaspora write the rules. Stitch, blur, collage, move from the side notes they have long been rendered into. In a palace that once dictated taste, the exhibition proposes a better standard: plural, stylish, critical, and, most importantly, collective. Far from asking the diaspora to apologise for its volume, it blares it as music – tuning the room, and clearly enunciating the conversation about what Indian art can be next.

The essayist-educator writes on culture, and is founding editor of Proseterity – a literary arts magazine.

ILLUSTRATION: ZAINAB TAMBAWALLA

A LITTLE LIFE

The curse of desire

And why, for many, being self-aware is the biggest offence

On a beautiful spring day in April, a young woman walked into Phuphee's garden. We had been tending to her garden since the early hours of the morning despite there having been a light shower. Phuphee was planting bulbs for lilies and freesias, which she hoped would bloom later on in the summer.

When she was done, she stood over the flower beds and uttered a prayer, blowing over them repeatedly, invoking God to bless her with blooms. As soon as she spotted the young woman, she instructed one of the helpers to bring some *kahwa* and *kandi kulchas* (a chunky, sweet biscuit-like snack sprinkled with poppy seeds).

She greeted the woman and invited her to follow her into her room. I waited, hoping she would ask me to join them but she didn't. An hour later they came onto the verandah, the young woman's eyes red rimmed and her *kohl* smeared, but she didn't look sad. I saw Phuphee rest her hand on the woman's arm and whisper, '*Hemath* [strength]'. She smiled and left.

A few days later I understood why the young woman had come over, and why Phuphee hadn't invited me in. The woman, whose name was Zeenat, had caused an uproar in the district of Shopian. She had done the unthinkable: she had asked for a *khula* [divorce that is initiated by a woman] on the grounds that her husband was unable to carry out any intimate conjugal duties.

Zeenat had been married for over two years, and had waited patiently for her husband to agree to seek further medical help. But he along with his family had flatly refused. As they put it, 'It wasn't possible for there to be anything wrong with their son', despite Zeenat repeatedly showing them test results that proved otherwise. She had left the marital home after the last argument that the couple had had.

Zeenat had been trying to convince him to see a specialist but he had refused saying, 'If it was God's will, it would happen.' Upon hearing this, she had become frustrated, lost her temper and screamed, 'But your plumbing doesn't work.' This had led the young man's parents to rush into their room to see what the commotion was about. When Zeenat had explained it to them, they had put the blame squarely on her shoulders, saying that she shouldn't expect her husband to be understanding when she couldn't even give him a child. She had tried to tell them of her predicament in a respectable manner but her husband had stepped in and said that everything she was saying was nothing but a fabrication. After that, Zeenat had zoned out.

She had packed up her belongings and gone back to her maternal home in the next village. A week later she had sent a village elder to her husband's house asking for a *khula*. It had been a few months since then, and though her husband hadn't yet agreed to the *khula*, the rest of the district hadn't stopped talking about her. The elders called her an abomination, a harbinger of doom and the downfall of morality; the men spoke of her as a fallen woman; and the women called her vile and shameless. She was shunned by all polite society.

At the time, I was barely 20 and I could not understand why everyone seemed so angry with Zeenat. So, I asked Phuphee.

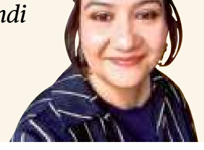
'Well for one, it is not acceptable for a woman to have desires. And then for a woman to express it so explicitly is unheard of. To top it all off, because she has been unable to fulfil her desire, she has decided to do something about it. But I guess the biggest offence is that she is absolutely aware of and sure of herself. I mean a woman who knows what she wants and how to get it? It doesn't get any more offensive than that,' Phuphee replied, smoking her two cigarettes a little more intensely than usual.

I couldn't work out from her tone if she was cross with Zeenat or in awe of her. I suspected the latter. We had been sitting on her verandah having *nun chai* and *kandi kulchas*. I sat there trying to work out what she meant – that it was unacceptable for a woman to have desires or to express them explicitly.

I waited for Phuphee to say something further, but she was lost in her own thoughts. She kept smoking, sipping her *kahwa*, and nibbling away at her *kulcha* until it was gone. When she was done with all three, she said she was going to say her prayers.

She turned around at the door and before disappearing into the dark corridor, said, '*Myoan gaash* [light of my eyes], the poppy plant is a wondrous and fragile thing, easy to destroy, beautiful to look at, and gives us *khash khaash* [poppy seeds] and *afeem* [opium], a substance both deadly and useful – with the ability to destroy or treat. You know, I always wonder if the poppy is self-aware. Does it know its own power or is it clueless?'

When she had gone inside, I thought about what she had just said. Her words induced an anxiety within me, but I knew enough of Phuphee to know that the antidote wouldn't be far and I relaxed. With every passing day I realised that among other things, her words were a warning and a reminder – a warning about the possible challenges coming my way, and a reminder that within me lay power which, if harnessed, could do wondrous things. Just like Zeenat's power had done.



Saba Mahjoor, a Kashmiri living in England, spends her scant free time contemplating life's vagaries.